

# 2005 Crime and Safety Report

**Europe - United Kingdom**

**May 12 2005**

## **Overall Crime And Safety Situation**

The latest published crime figures for London, from the Metropolitan Police, show that total crime is down by 1.9 percent compared to last year, equivalent to 13,000 fewer crimes. Motor vehicle crime is down 13.2 percent from last year's figures with 14,000 fewer offences. Gun-enabled crime is 9.6 percent lower than last year; knife-enabled crime is 8.2 percent down from last year. The detection rate for homicides currently stands at 94 percent. The crimes against persons rate, which includes a range of offenses including murder, harassment, common assault, actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm, shows a 10.2 percent increase over the past 12 months. The homicide rate specifically, which includes murder, manslaughter and infanticide, is down 15.5 percent over the same 12-month period. Rape statistics over the same 12-month period are up 2.2 percent, while all other sexual offenses, including indecent assault and unlawful (under age) sexual intercourse are up 15.5 percent. Total robbery offenses, defined as theft with the use of force or a threat of force, both personal and commercial robbery, indicate current decrease of 6.7 percent. Residential burglaries, defined as theft or attempted theft, from a residential building where access is not authorized indicate a 7.8 percent decrease over the past 12 months.

The Metropolitan Police area covers all of the London boroughs and has a population of more than 10 million people from many diverse cultures. Additionally, the police have responsibilities for the millions of tourist that visit London each year. The greater London area covers an area of 1,584 sq. km and is the smallest of the England's nine regions, consisting of only 1.2 percent of the total land area of England.

There are no widespread, general crime-related security problems that should affect travel or business in the UK.

## **Political Violence**

There is no indication of any specific threats against Americans. There have been successful terrorist operations conducted within this country in the past several years and, while Americans have not been specifically targeted, collateral damage or injury remains a risk, especially in Northern Ireland, specifically

Belfast.

While London has been the site of political violence, a cease-fire declaration issued by PIRA on July 20, 1997, has been tentatively holding. However, radical splinter groups have attempted to disrupt these talks through violence such as bombings in Northern Ireland and in London, and assassinations in Northern Ireland. These groups have traditionally not targeted American establishments or individuals, but the danger of sustaining collateral damage or injury by being in the vicinity of a bombing remains a risk.

The general threat worldwide has risen based on the attacks in the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States and subsequent attacks worldwide. These incidents underscore the threat of terrorism, and the need for all Americans overseas to maintain a low profile and be extremely vigilant. Military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq and the uncertain political climate in the Middle East, provides the rational, thus potential, for terrorist acts directed against Americans, and is viewed as a long-term threat to U.S. interests in Western Europe. The UK, because of its close relationship with the U.S., is considered a viable target for terrorist groups. Radical Islamic groups, or their surrogates, often the topic in the UK press, have demonstrated the capability to operate on UK soil, thus increasing the potential for terrorist attack against Americans. While there is no specific information that Americans in the UK are or have been targets of terrorist attacks, the threat remains significant. Continuing tensions regarding the situation in Iraq, the war on terrorism and the Palestinian/Israeli conflict have prompted several peaceful anti-U.S. demonstrations throughout 2002, 2003 and 2004.

In November 2003 the overall terrorist threat rating in the UK was changed from "substantial" to "severe general." Available intelligence and recent events indicate that terrorists have an established capability and current intent to mount an attack on targets within the UK. This increase reflects the British Security Services growing concern about the likelihood of a terrorist attack in the UK. It is not based on any specific intelligence about an attack, its timing or target.

Throughout 2004, a number of protest groups, including the Stop the War Coalition have held a number of non-violent anti-war demonstrations throughout the UK. These events are typically peaceful demonstrations and are well policed.

### **Post-Specific Concerns**

There are no unique concerns for the business traveler to London, other than those listed elsewhere in this report.

## **Police and Medical Emergencies**

The police and other emergency services in the UK are excellent. The nationwide telephone number to summon emergency assistance is "999." This number will summon police, fire and ambulance services. You must state the nature of your emergency, and the operator will connect you to the proper emergency service. Non-emergency calls should not be made to "999," but to other numbers found in the telephone directory.

Those traveling on motorways (highways) can summon assistance on SOS phones (painted orange) located alongside the motorways.

## **Tips to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

London, like other urban centers, has its share of street crime. However, violent criminal confrontations and the use of weapons are relatively rare in the UK. Most violent crimes, including those involving firearms, are between members of rival criminal gangs. Burglars and pickpockets are very active, and visitors are encouraged to safeguard their valuables and not carry large amounts of cash or unneeded credit cards. Visitors should be particularly careful on crowded streets, in entertainment areas, in department stores, restaurants, or on crowded public transportation. Auto thefts and thefts from vehicles occur frequently. Briefcases and coats left in cars are attractive targets for criminals because high tech laptops, Palm Pilots or cell phones may be kept in them. Travelers should not leave valuables in hotel rooms, regardless of the stature of the hotel.

In London, as in any major city, travelers should be cognizant of the fact that credit card fraud is of concern, and travelers should take necessary precautions to safeguard their credit card details. Additionally, ATM fraud is common. Criminals have installed fake devices into card slots, which capture the information from the card allowing the criminal to create a duplicate card. They also use hidden micro-cameras or other devices to capture the PIN as it is entered. The following precautions should be taken when using an ATM:

- Do not use ATMs located in isolated areas.
- Before entering your card, check the machine to see if anything is stuck to the machine or it looks unusual in anyway. If so, do not use this machine.
- Cover the keypad with your free hand to prevent anyone from seeing you enter your PIN.

- If distracted by someone when using the machine, cancel the transaction and retrieve your card.
- If your card isn't returned, immediately report this to the card provider.

The quality of private security and investigative services in London and the UK is generally equivalent to services received in other major European and American cities. Private security employees are not allowed to carry firearms.

### **For Further Information**

The RSO can be contacted at 44 (0) 20-7894-0391. Americans requiring assistance can contact the American Citizens Services section of the Embassy Consular section at 44 (0) 20-7499-9000, Ext. 2553 or 2555. Embassy London's Consular Information Sheet describes health, safety and a variety of useful travel information, and can be accessed on the World Wide Web at <http://www.usembassy.org.uk>. The Department of State's central web site, <http://travel.state.gov>, provides access to all U.S. Embassy web sites, as well as, travel warnings and security alerts.

For business matters, the Embassy Foreign Commercial Service Commerce is also present in London, at 44 (0) 20-7493-0381.

In an emergency, individuals can contact the Embassy at 44 (0) 20-7499-9000 and can be referred to the appropriate duty officer, depending upon the nature of the emergency.